



COALITION OF FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date and Time: February 9, 2022, 1:35-2:58 pm (EST)

Location: Webex

Agenda:

1. Executive Committee election update/reminder to vote
2. IOA Standards of Practice update
3. Ombuds Day 2022 is October 13th – Guest: ABA Ombuds Day Subcommittee Chair Ryan Smith
4. Social Media Committee update/COFO LinkedIn Group
5. OmbudsLinked LinkedIn Discussion Group
6. USOA Annual Conference Request for Proposals
7. COFO Website – help still needed!
8. Peer Practitioner Network update/participant survey
9. Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative reminder
10. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) meeting 2/23/22
11. Announcements – Training opportunities, job openings, or really any office and ombudsman happenings you'd like to tell the world about
12. General Questions - Space for new and emerging practitioners and programs to ask questions and get feedback from the COFO community in a short discussion format
13. Discussion Topics
 - a. “The OmbudsLinked LinkedIn group discussed issues of ombuds process accessibility last week. They identified some themes of inaccessible offices, including having no sense of privacy or confidentiality, poor communication, no ability to understand the value of the service, difficult to understand processes or expectations, and making the visitor do all of the process navigation themselves. So with those negative traits in mind, what can we do to make our offices’ services more visitor-centric? What have you seen work well elsewhere that you’d like to blend into your own service and process? And what you are you proud of in your own offices?”

Highlights:

1. **Executive Committee election update/reminder to vote**
 - a. Voting continues through the end of 2/11/2022.
 - b. Voting members of COFO are full-time practicing Federal ombuds and practice to the Standards of independence, confidentiality, and impartiality.

- c. Email update has been sent regarding candidate Tyler Smith, who dropped his candidacy and is willing to help out for the next few months.
- d. By 9/1/2022, COFO will call for a new election for a second Co-Coordinator.
- e. If you think you are a voting member and have not received a link to vote, please let the Election Committee, comprised of Elisa Enriquez, Jenn Mahony, or Bina Patel, or COFO Chair Paul Sotoudeh know.

2. IOA Standards of Practice update

- a. IOA has circulated an updated draft of IOA Standards of Practice and Code of Conduct addressing issues and concerns the previous draft raised and has held town halls.
- b. COFO submitted feedback to IOA from members' comments, and IOA was receptive.
- c. If you have additional feedback, submit a note to Paul or anyone on the Executive Committee, and they will get it to IOA.

3. Ombuds Day 2022 is October 13th – Guest: ABA Ombuds Day Subcommittee Chair Ryan Smith

- a. Ryan Smith, Ombuds Day Subcommittee Chair, announced that Ombuds Day is 10/13/2022, the second Thursday of October, and Ombuds Day has been celebrated annually since 2018.
- b. Goals include educating the public, encouraging the use of ombuds, and uniting and connecting ombuds professionals.
- c. Ombuds Day is coordinated through the ABA's Dispute Resolution Section Ombuds Committee and the Ombuds Day Subcommittee.
- d. Ryan wants to recruit someone from the COFO community to serve on the subcommittee, as they aim for a cross-section of ombuds from different sectors to serve, including from IOA, COFO, NASOP, and USOA.
- e. If anyone is willing to serve, contact Ryan Smith at smit3034@msu.edu.
- f. Anticipated tasks include monthly meetings, with the frequency increasing as the event nears, serving as COFO liaison, coordinating events such as webinars, supporting proclamations, marketing, and collaborating to support the broader ombuds umbrella.
- g. Review email previously sent for additional information.
- h. Please reach out to Ryan or Paul if interested.

4. Social Media Committee update/COFO LinkedIn Group

- a. Erica Katherine reported that the COFO LinkedIn Group has 46 members and has doubled.
- b. It is a closed group, so it is great platform to ask questions, to add content for discussion, and to continue the discussion from meetings, to connect, learn, and grow.
- c. If you want to join the Social Media Committee, which meets quarterly, please reach out to Erica at erica.katherine@fda.hhs.gov.

5. OmbudsLinked LinkedIn Discussion Group

- a. Jenn Mahony shared that this is a closed group welcoming all types of practicing ombuds to build camaraderie, share insights and ideas, and to unite the profession.
- b. They host events, including an upcoming one on 2/17/2022.

6. USOA Annual Conference Request for Proposals

- a. Erica Katherine announced that the 41st USOA Annual Conference will be held 9/14-16, 2022 and is scheduled to be in person in Portsmouth, NH.
- b. There is a call for session presenters and keynote speakers.
- c. An email will be sent out with additional information.

7. COFO Website – help still needed!

- a. The Department of Education has been hosting COFO’s website, and we appreciate their partnership.
- b. They have asked us to find a new home, and we still do not have a new host.
- c. Though the website does not take much space, we have no budget.
- d. We need to update the website regularly, not daily or weekly, but from time-to-time.
- e. Please let the Executive Committee know if you have ideas.

8. Peer Practitioner Network update/participant survey

- a. Susanne Porch shared that when the pilot Peer Practitioner Network launched in 8/2021, we said we would assess it around the six month mark, which has arrived.
- b. In the next couple of weeks, participants will receive a survey of 8-10 questions to answer.
- c. In early to mid-March, we will schedule a meeting to discuss the results.

9. Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative reminder

- a. Reminder that the Voluntary Leave Transfer Initiative is a way to help connect ombuds with ombuds who have been approved by their Federal agency for voluntary leave transfer.
- b. Because of the ombuds role and concerns about independence and impartiality, concerns are raised about ombuds asking stakeholders to donate, so this initiative was created to avoid such issues.
- c. If you have questions, reach out to Wendy Kamenshine, Heather Milner, or Susanne Porch.

10. Next Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) meeting 2/23/22

- a. Ombuds Supporting Ombuds (OSO) is a space COFO created almost two years ago in response to the pandemic, for reflection, sharing, community discussion, venting, and connecting.
- b. At the next meeting, on 2/23/2022 from 2-3 pm EST, Olivia Walker of DOD will present, “Where do we grow from here?”

11. Announcements

- a. None

12. General Questions

- a. None

13. Discussion Topic

- a. Guy Weber led the discussion of the following question:
 “The OmbudsLinked LinkedIn group discussed issues of ombuds process accessibility last week. They identified some themes of inaccessible offices, including having no sense of privacy or confidentiality, poor communication, no ability to understand the value of the service, difficult to understand processes or expectations, and making the visitor do all of the process navigation themselves. So with those negative traits in mind, what can we do to make our offices’ services more visitor-centric? What have you seen work well elsewhere that you’d like to blend into your own service and process? And what you are you proud of in your own offices?”
- b. Share success stories.
- c. Meet people where they are, on the platform they are comfortable with, or meeting at 9 pm or non-traditional work hours, for example, as people may be shift workers, in different time zones or more comfortable on non-Federal platforms.
- d. Be flexible in the way people can reach us, especially considering the pandemic.
- e. Some visitors appreciate the offer to talk by phone or video, not defaulting to video.
- f. When an ombuds was not reaching demographic pockets because of a lack of trust, they worked with organizations helping low-income individuals. Cultivate relationships with allies to make the ombuds services more accessible.
- g. In one organization, they had their media division make an ombuds brochure specific to the program, explained the purpose, and included a message from the Director on the back cover endorsing the program.
- h. External ombuds noted they set up outreach tables at events, such as an industry conference or forum. They give examples of what ombuds do. Some have video snapshots of how to contact them and what they do.
- i. Make sure people understand the safety of the ombuds space.
- j. House the ombuds office out of the way, in a discreet location. Some are not in the main building or the executive level, given the importance of discretion and a sense of privacy. An office behind a doorbell was inaccessible, but across from a library was appealing since anyone could visit.
- k. Make ombuds space relaxing, comfortable, and inviting, an oasis.
- l. The theme of being visitor-centric was discussed, opening the door for people to come even without problems.
- m. Give people a way to approach ombuds to see if they want to delve further.
- n. An ombuds sometimes explained to people that if they just "had a good idea" they might want to come see the ombuds.

- o. Ombuds shared that simple things like a lending library, a candy bowl, and just being warm and friendly can help people feel comfortable stopping by, even if they don't want to admit yet that they have something particular they want to discuss.
- p. Similarly, ombuds can meet with leadership to check in even without a problem.
- q. Go to newcomers' briefings, new employee orientation sessions, to increase awareness of the ombuds.
- r. One ombuds markets to soldiers in transition out of the military in case they have concerns.
- s. External ombuds can build allies within the organization and show the connection to the mission.
- t. An ombuds met with internal groups, such as HR, EEO, and Legal Counsel, early on to determine at what point they would refer folks to them, which gave them an opportunity to learn their functions as well as get them to refer folks to the ombuds.
- u. Ombuds want to be connected so offices refer people to them but not too close so people know they serve everyone.
- v. An external ombuds office connects with the phone center to share best times to refer people, so the ombuds will be available to assist.
- w. An external ombuds office conducts inreach meetings across the agency to keep components engaged and remind them that the office is one of last resort and conducts outreach outside the agency.
- x. Always be on your game, as you never know who may recommend you or vouch for your quality, wherever the person serves in the organization.
- y. Bystanders and bystanders of bystanders may think they saw or heard something unsafe. An ombuds noted that bystanders and bystanders of bystanders brought a big percentage of the most serious cases, as they are not as close to the situation.

Additional note: Paul thanked Laurel Gordon, Erica Katherine, and Lisa Levine, Executive Committee members who have been valued members of the leadership team, whose term is ending. Appreciation was shared from those three individuals, the other members of the Executive Committee, and individuals from the membership.

Attendance 02/09/2021

Last	First	Agency	Call-In
Anderson	Jeff	DOE	1
Baker	Jason	NIH	1
Berg	Mollie	DOD / National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA)	1
Bookstein	Monique	Prince William County Public Schools	1
Brown	Dallas	DHS / National Protection and Programs Directorate	1
Cameron	Bob	CFPB	1

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Cecil	Tina	FBI	1
Davenport Dayes	Nicky	FEMA	1
DeBerry	Marcella	NSA	1
Doyle	Bill	Secret Service	1
Enriquez	Elisa	Los Alamos Laboratory (DOE)	1
Epps	Ayanna	FDIC	1
Footman	Aaron	USPTO	1
Gordon	Laurel	DOJ / U. S. Marshals Service (USMS)	1
Harley	Jasmine	National Credit Union Administration	1
Hebron	Eric	ATF	1
Hendrickson	Caitlan	FEMA	1
Holland	Shavon	Dept of Education	1
Hopkins	Emilee	NGA	1
Kamenshine	Wendy	CFPB	1
Katherine	Erica	FDA	1
Kelly	John	SBA	1
Kinnavy	Noreen	USAGM	1
Lawrence	Steve	DHS Office of Intelligence & Analysis	1
Lenkel	Laurie	FDA	1
Levine	Lisa	DOJ / Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR)	1
Lewis	Mark D.	FDA	1
Lloyd	Brenda	FLETC	1
Mahony	Jennifer	Boston Childrens Hospital	1
Manderson	Katie	VA	1
Manzines	Rosamaria	Prince William County Public Schools	1
Maurer	Bill	Census	1
McGuire- Nelson	Darnella	CFPB	1
Mesbahi	Mohammad	IRS Taxpayer Advocate Service	1
Miller	Carla	DOJ / ATF	1
Milner	Heather	CFPB	1
Patel	Bina	USPTO	1
Patno	Arielle	FDA / Center for Tobacco Products	1
Piziali	Jamie	EPA	1
Porch	Susanne	Commerce / National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)	1

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Reilly	Kevin	NASA	1
Robinson	Belinda	FBI	1
Rowe	Mary	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	1
Simpson	Candace		1
Skodacek	Ken	FDA	1
Smith	Ryan	Michigan State University (ABA Ombuds Day)	1
Smith	Julie	Census	1
Sotoudeh	Paul	USPTO	1
Stergio	Marcus	Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs / DOL	1
Thomson	Ronnie	Sandia National Laboratories	1
Tisdell	Laurice	CMS	1
Vermillion	Chris	DOE	1
Voloshin	Victor	NIH	1
Walker	Olivia	DOD / Army Medical Readiness Assistance Program	1
Weber	Guy	DOD / NGA	1
White	Karen	DOD / National Guard Bureau	1
Wolfe	Lexi	DOE	1
Yuille Banford	Deanna	DOD / Defense Human Resources Activity	1
		Total	58